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ensuring work-family balance;
advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity
in Europe”**

**Prevention and development of
human skills in the family**

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The condition of the modern family is characterized by two strong components: on one hand, major social and cultural achievements and on the other open and decisive challenges. The elements that have been historically acquired provide to the family values, strength and success. The missing elements cause difficulties, problems and threaten the efforts made.

Thinking about the family and its development implicates the recognition and the enhancement of the acquired components. However, it also requires identifying the exact current challenges in order to give them a competent and innovative response.

This current phase of history needs a new logic to interpret reality and original tools to enable processes of growth and improvement. The process of social innovation for the family can be conceived on the basis of the knowledge and development of personal skills.

A. Two types of problems

Today's society encounters two types of problems. A historical and well-known problem is poverty, intended both as deficiency in economic terms and in the human dimension, as the inability to manage self-sufficiency and create wealth within the household.

Modern families are also disrupted by a second type of problem, a new type of difficulty for which society is unprepared and has not established effective responses yet. The set of problems can be grouped into the concept of: lack of relationship and personal skills. This deficiency manifests itself in a long list of specific problems: conflict, unfaithfulness, divorce, difficulties with children; which can then cause bullying, early school leaving and psychosomatic disorders.

In recent decades several personal and social indicators have shown a serious worsening: increase in divorces, increased depression and personality disorders, greater use of psychotropic drugs, even in early childhood, alcohol abuse and smoking among young people, prostitution and difficulties in finding a job. Be noted that these serious problems are not necessarily connected to economic poverty.

Underlying all these issues it is possible to identify the lack of personal skills necessary to sustain life experiences and direct them in a constructive way.

From a careful analysis of the present reality, research in the innovation in human skills offers guidelines and practical tools to address both types of problems jointly. It proposes to take action on the development of life skills to overcome the condition of poverty and to prevent and solve behavioral and interpersonal problems.

B. A new operating logic

In the past, the difficulties in family and social context have been addressed with ways that have proven to be unsuccessful. One of today's main challenges is to design a new paradigm that can enable a real growth processes.

The classical approach suggests focusing the attention on the problem in order to solve it. This mode includes two poles: on one side the resource (wealth) and on the other the lack (poverty). The aid shall take place by pouring the resource in the shortage so that the wealth shall be consumed to overcome poverty. It is a single movement: a one way giving and receiving. This form of action alleviates the negative effect but does not eliminate the cause to the root.

We propose a new approach: to focus on life skills to prevent the onset of the problem and, also, to remove it where it is present. The development of life skills creates a form of relationship in which there is an exchange of mutual help: the movement is no longer one-way but two-way, each one can give and can receive help. In other words, instead of providing a passive support, enabling constructive interaction: two parties help each other.

Greater maturity in the human field, made of knowledge, skills, personal choices and a real commitment, is the force that removes the problems at source. Not only it deals with the final effects but it also transforms the starting point.

Thus, a good direction for innovation policies for the family is (thus) conceiving growth projects aimed at all citizens, not just at those who are in trouble but also at those projects that have the goal of increasing personal maturity, the ability to improve the relationship and lifestyle.

Within these projects, each family can grow. The family that lives in a state of well being may conceive more complex and sophisticated goals and may progress further and contribute to active citizenship. The family that is suffering poverty, hardship or exclusion may be involved in learning experiences without negative labeling.

In summary, the processes of social innovation for the family can be designed on a new basis:

- To focus attention and give priority to the development of relationship skills and personal skills;
- Human skills are the resource that prevents and solves problems at the root;
- Human skills are the driving force that promotes the progress on both individual and social level;
- Growth plans for all families, for those in need and for those who are stable;
- Support mutual help projects, where everyone can give and everyone can receive.

C. Relationship skills in family

Relationships have been so far left to spontaneity, without any special training: some do not encounter major difficulties but to a significant extent many appear dysfunctional and cause discomfort. The quality of relationships is a vital component that determines the stability of the couple's relationship and effectiveness in the education of children; therefore, it cannot be overlooked as a secondary element.

The nature of human relationships is a key factor that helps determining the quality of family life. It is therefore essential to address this area as a goal and a field in which it is possible to activate innovation and growth.

Relationship skills can be conceived as real functions to be studied understood and developed.

Family members can learn to communicate properly and increase mutual understanding, they can fully express themselves, help each other and collaborate more effectively.

Communication difficulties are the basis of family conflict that subsequently leads to separation and divorce. Even the failures in the education of children are mostly of behavioral nature, and therefore, due to an inability in transmission.

Increasing the relationship skills in the family means to contribute to the stability of the family, prevent conflict and divorce, raise the quality of education, and contribute to the personal well-being of each component, to make people collaborative within the family and in communities.

Good relationships within the family contribute to the success of the family and create the opportunity to interact with other families and therefore be supporters of active citizenship.

D. Personal skills in family

Today's society is characterized by increasing complexity. Family is at the center of several inquiries and a high number of tasks to be fulfilled. Complexity can be seen as a synonym of refinement, but at the same time implies more management skills.

Family is supported by personal skills: clarity of objectives, lifestyle choices, planning time, organization, daily habits, health care, supporting stress, fixing errors, professional skills that ensure survival, problem solving, facing incidents and injustices, running the house and goods.

Building a family has been so far a spontaneous experience.

Progress in the community can be brought in innovative ways: conceiving the skills to create and build a family.

Personal skills are crucial to create stable families, capable of being self sufficient and to participate in social development in an active way contributing to the resolution of present issues such as poverty, marginalization, prostitution, divorce and many more.

Skills can grow with the spread of knowledge, practical experiences and projects. The increase in skills leads to personal maturity that makes a person autonomous thus not at risk of poverty or marginalization.

E. Innovation for family: prevention, problem solving and growth

How can we regard the development of the family?

Actions in favor of the family have the task of responding to three major challenges:

- To solve the current problems
- To prevent the recurrence of problems in time
- To conquer new goals toward an unprecedented maturity.

Among present *problems* we can mention: poverty, divorce, difficulties in raising children, infidelity, prostitution, abuse of harmful substances from youngsters and adults that affect health (alcohol, smoking, drugs), the increase in psychological problems associated with the consumption of psychotropic drugs, unemployment and the inability to ensure the maintenance of the family.

One of the greatest gifts that Family Policies should make to European families is a real commitment to reduce and solve these issues.

An innovative form of *prevention* can be found in the development of relationship skills and personal skills. The maturity on the human level allows each individual to act correctly and therefore avoid falling victim of the weaknesses and problems above mentioned. Personal skills are (a) means to transform problems into projects, thus the negative aspects can be managed with a positive logic. The personal achievements are a source of comfort, give stability to the family and can offer the best contributions to society.

Families can proceed toward *new goals* such as stability, relationships based on respect and understanding, excellent collaboration that allows to satisfy the needs and to achieve important goals, better health, a high level of personal well-being, greater ability to ensure economic self-reliance, values and commitment to the community, take action in volunteer work in ones own territory, create a network of relationships between families and local institutions to achieve common purposes.

There are several actions that can be taken to implement the above objectives, but one undoubtedly new and effective way of facing them, is through the *innovation in human skills*.

Acting for the maturity in human terms. Maturity that allows each individual and each family to grow up become independent, progress, achieve goals and contribute to the community.

The mere presence of personal and relationships skills, which acts as a form of prevention to discomfort, has within itself the potential for the resolution of problems as well as the push for progress.

F. The priority of today's family

1. The stability of the household

A priority for the families of today and tomorrow is stability.

The free choice of the partner and divorce are achievements of civilization that allow people to lead their lives according to their qualities and requirements, as well as the changes that occur with time.

However, after the conquest of these stages, it is essential to consider the next step: the personal maturity to form a stable family over time. Being able to share their lives with a spouse and children thanks to their ability to love, to communicate, collaborate and solve problems together, without breaking the relationship.

Stability ensures the wellbeing of the family by reinforcing it; it also offers the ideal environment for raising children and gives a deeper meaning to the couple's relationship. It is also the base of the family's state of wealth.

2. Maturity in sexuality

Another priority of the family is a healthy sex life within the couple relationship. In our society we have known sexual repression as well as the lack of restraint. The fluctuations between these two extreme points have caused the issue of infidelity and prostitution. Dissatisfaction in the intimate sphere is also one of the causes of separations.

When sexuality is experienced in a complete and balanced way within the couple, maintaining fidelity to one partner becomes an element of real personal maturity that provides value and vitality to the couple. It also helps making the relationship stable and as well as dynamic.

3. The quality of education

In the education of children it is a priority to improve relations and learning processes: to reduce misunderstandings, tensions, wounds and increase understanding, support and collaboration. The development of life skills can make childhood an happier time and increase the maturity of the youngsters. It represents the best action to prevent the discomfort as well as to center goals.

The quality of education can evolve by teaching adults to teach with love and firmness, without the use of painful stimuli. Kids can learn and be more respected.

Another option of intervention is the study of relationship skills that can be learned simultaneously by all generations.

4. Economic autonomy

In a historical period marked by economic crisis, self-sufficiency assumes a central role. Managing the family's material needs must be understood as a responsibility of the family that is supported by talent and skills.

It is also necessary to combine vocational training to individual talents, clarity and determination: choosing a job, producing results, collaborating with others. Nowadays, it is not enough to know how to perform a job. It is fundamental to also develop elements of human nature such as loyalty, fairness, honesty, commitment to ecological sustainability, sensitivity to social problems and ethics.

5. Projects for the family

Families can implement projects of development in which it is possible to keep the valuable elements acquired, reduce or eliminate disorders and achieve higher standards.

Projects involving the care of health of each component, improving relations, maintenance of the house where you live, realization of goals and personal growth of each member.

Historically, the act of planning has been a feature of companies that set themselves goals and appropriate procedures to achieve them. Planning can also enter the family universe and become a reference point, an element of cohesion and stimulus to cooperation.

6. Active citizenship

Each family is called to participate to their community and to contribute to the common goals that lead to a common good. There are numerous ways in which a family can interact with its community: volunteering, fostering, social promotion, cultural events, networks of mutual aid, cooperation between families, and participation in local politics.

Active citizenship is understood as an expression of personal maturity of each citizen. It represents the most widespread and powerful source of prevention of social problems and the ideal path to progress.

Each family can be in relation with other families with the awareness of building together the Community in which they live and in which the new generations grow.

G. Proposals for the development of the Policies for the Family

1. Promoting innovation in human skills in the family as the direction for emancipation and for personal and social progress.
2. Promoting the study and development personal skills and relationship skills in families, school and in society as an engine of growth and problems resolution.
3. Design projects for the family designed for all the citizens in which it is possible to pursue new goals, to address problems and to originate a joint action for their prevention.
4. Reinforce the value of a married life and family stability, to be conquered and maintained thanks to the personal skills: understanding, collaboration, planning and a healthy sexual life.
5. Innovating the quality of education from a human perspective: reduce the use of painful stimuli, increase personal skills, increase learning through understanding and firmness and improve relations.